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## ABSTRACT

This guide to the use of collaborative teams to facilitate the inclusion of all students, including those with disabilities, covers the following topics: (1) uses of collaborative teams (e.g., team teaching, peer coaching/mentoring, teacher assistance teams, pre-assessment teams, and student support teams); (2) benefits and motivating factors for establishing collaborative school teams; (3) the purpose of collaborative teams; (4) the functions of collaborative teams (such as monitoring progress toward Individualized Education Program goals); (5) five basic elements of collaborative teams (such as frequent face-to-face interactions, a positive sense of interdependence, and individual accountability); (6) shared leadership through team roles; (7) stages of team development; and (8) characteristics of effective team members. Contains 19 references. (DB)

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# **Collaborative Teaming for Inclusion-Oriented Schools:**

*An Introduction and Video Guide*

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## Strategic Directions for Kansas Education

The Kansas State Board of Education is charged with the general supervision of public education and other educational interests in the state. While clearly acknowledging the role and importance of local control, the State Board of Education has the responsibility to provide direction and leadership for the structuring of all state educational institutions under its jurisdiction.

The beginning place for determining the mission for the Kansas State Board of Education is the assumption that all Kansas citizens must be involved in their own learning and the learning of others. It is the combined effort of family, school, and community that makes possible the development of a high quality of life. It is the parent who is the first "teacher" of children. As we grow older, we learn that the school, the workplace, and the community support our lifelong learning and our training and retraining. The Board recognizes the responsibility it holds for Kansas educational systems and promoting quality education programs. The mission for Kansas education is:

**To prepare each person with the living, learning, and working skills and values necessary for caring, productive, and fulfilling participation in our evolving, global society.**

We believe that the strategic directions for the structuring of Kansas education must be organized to:

- create learning communities
- develop and extend resources for parenting programs and early childhood education
- expand learner-outcome curriculum and learner-focused instruction
- provide inclusive learning environments
- strengthen involvement of business and industry in education
- provide quality staff and organizational development.



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**COLLABORATIVE**  
**T**  
**A**  
**M**  
**I**  
**N**  
**G**  
**FOR**  
**INCLUSION-ORIENTED**  
**SCHOOLS**

An introduction and video-guide

Developed through the Facilitating Least Restrictive Environment  
for Students with Deaf-Blindness: In School and Community Settings Project

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## **The Use of Collaborative Teams in Schools**

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“...many minds getting together...talking about ideas...  
It applies to many different areas in schools...”

-Steve Frazell, elementary principal  
Parsons District Schools

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There are many examples of ways to utilize collaborative teams in schools:

1. Team Teaching
2. Peer Coaching/Mentoring
3. Teacher Assistance Teams
4. Pre-Assessment Teams
5. Collaborative Consultation
6. Student Program Planning Teams
7. Student Support Teams

The processes and procedures for effective collaboration can, and have, been used in nearly every type of small group meeting that may occur in schools. Committees working on a variety of tasks including curriculum planning, textbook adoption, Parent Teacher Organization event planning, etc. can enhance their relationships and improve their outcomes by using collaborative processes.

No one person can effectively respond to the diverse psychological and educational needs of all students for whom they are responsible. Collaborative teaming is designed to create a feeling among members of the team that they ALL are responsible for the learning of ALL of the students to whom they are assigned (We sink-or swim together). Collaborative teams learn that they can best carry out their teaching responsibilities by pooling their diverse knowledge, skills, and resources.

In Table 1, Thousand and Villa (1990) summarize some of the benefits and motivating factors for establishing collaborative school teams. Each of the factors has been categorized into at least one of the five basic human need categories described by Glasser in his "control theory" of human behavior (1985,1986). According to his theory, people make choices in order to satisfy one or more of five basic human needs: (1) survival, (2) power or control of one's life, (3) freedom of choice, (4) sense of belonging, or (5) fun.

Collaborative teams enhance teachers' potential for survival and power in educating a diverse student body by creating opportunities for (a) the regular exchange of needed resources, expertise, and technical assistance and (b) professional growth through reciprocal peer coaching. In collaborative teams, members experience a sense of belonging and freedom from isolation by having others with whom to share the responsibility for accomplishing difficult tasks. Finally, it is fun to creatively problem solve and to engage in stimulating adult dialogue and social interactions (Thousand & Villa,1992).

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"It has really helped me grow professionally, as an educator..."

-Shirley Smith, 5th grade teacher  
Topeka Public Schools

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**Table 1*****Rationale, Potential Benefits, and Motivational Factors for Establishing Teaching Teams***

| <b>Survival/Power</b>   | <b>Freedom</b>   | <b>Sense of Belonging</b>  | <b>Fun</b>  |
|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides critical resources to regular education (Tindal, Shinn Walz, Germann, 1987; Reynolds, Wang &amp; Walberg, 1987; Will, 1986)</li> <li>• Promotes professional growth through peer coaching (Brandt, 1987)</li> <li>• Promotes acquisition of trust, communication, leadership and conflict resolution skills (Johnson &amp; Johnson, 1987 a)</li> <li>• Increases adult self-esteem (Johnson &amp; Johnson, 1987 b)</li> <li>• Increase the number of students who get help from specialized services (Armbruster &amp; Howe, 1985)</li> <li>• Decrease the number of students referred for specialized services through increased individualization (Gelzheiser, 1987)</li> <li>• Allows for sharing of skills</li> <li>• Provides access to technical assistance</li> <li>• Promotes perspective taking</li> <li>• Increases student:teacher direct contact</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases flexibility in scheduling and grouping (Olsen, 1968)</li> <li>• Allows for more effective and efficient use of each team members' skills (Armbruster &amp; Howe, 1985; Bauwens et al. , 1989)</li> <li>• Allows for division of labor (Fox &amp; Faver, 1984)</li> <li>• Facilitates sharing of responsibility for all children</li> <li>• Provides an opportunity to work with a variety of students</li> <li>• Reduces the amount of direct support needed from an administrator</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevates isolation (Bauwens et al, 1989; Fox &amp; Faver, 1984)</li> <li>• Motivates commitment to others (Fox &amp; Faver, 1984)</li> <li>• Develops positive interpersonal relationships (Johnson &amp; Johnson, 1987 b)</li> <li>• Increases social support (Johnson &amp; Johnson, 1987 b)</li> <li>• Promotes students inclusion with peers through elimination of pull-out programs (Armbruster &amp; Howe, 1985; Bauwens, et al. , 1989)</li> <li>• Allows for integration of specialists into the classroom settings</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for adult stimulation, professional talk, and action (Lieberman, 1986)</li> <li>• Provides someone to laugh with</li> <li>• Enables creativity</li> <li>• Creates a positive learning environment</li> <li>• Improves staff morale</li> </ul> |

Thousand, J. and Villa, R. (1990).

NOTE: All items in the table without citations were identified by Vermont teaching team members through a structured interview developed by the authors.



## **Collaborative Teaming is ....**

*an organizational and instructional arrangement of two or more members of the school and community who distribute among themselves planning, instructional and evaluation responsibilities for the same students on a regular basis for an extended period (Thousand & Villa, 1990).*

Collaborative Teaming is teachers, principals, parents, paraprofessionals, and others working together. It provides opportunities for these members of a school community to plan, solve problems, teach, and implement educational plans. When collaborative teams work well; members have equal voices, support one another through success and conflict, and share the responsibilities of reaching the goals of the team.

## **The Purpose of Collaborative Teaming is ...**

*to increase the potential for individualizing instruction and enabling all students to be educated with their same-age peers within local school general education settings. (Thousand & Villa, 1990)*

*to allow greater opportunities to capitalize upon the unique, diverse, and specialized knowledge, skills, and instructional approaches of the team members (Bauwens, et al., 1989)*

More and more frequently, student team members share the goal of educating students in neighborhood schools and regular classrooms. Achieving this goal requires input from a variety of people in the school community. Collaborative teaming provides a process and a structure that encourages and develops cooperation.

Schools need a way for regular and special educators to learn to share the ownership and responsibility for the education of ALL students. The regular educator brings expertise about grade level curriculum; information about the needs of the entire class and its individual members; information about her classroom schedule, teaching methods and materials; and many other specific skills and abilities. The special educator brings expertise about specific handicapping conditions and their educational implications; knowledge of special education procedures; experience in the development of individual education programs; information about teaching methods and materials; and many other specific skills and abilities. The same is true of each member of the student planning team. Each individual brings particular information and expertise to the team process. Expertise that could benefit ALL students.

In our present system, it is more typical that special educators plan for and teach special education students and regular educators plan for and teach regular education students. Collaborative teaming provides a vehicle for sharing that expertise more effectively to better meet the needs of ALL students.

## **Some Functions of Collaborative Teams are ...**

***to provide support to instructional staff in regular education settings through the development of an instructional plan.***

Collaborative teams meet on a regular basis, throughout the school year, to plan and assess the on-going instruction and education program. Team members discuss a variety of items including: student needs, progress toward IEP goals, social interaction with adults and peers, behavior issues, self-care needs, adaptation of classroom activities, community-based instruction, special events, etc. The agenda for each meeting is generated by the team members to meet their questions and needs as well. Each child's educational program is unique based on the student needs, the classroom teacher's instructional style, and the composition of the classroom. The educational program is much more flexible when collaborative teams meet on a regular basis. Changes and adjustments in the plan can be made much more quickly when teams meet once a week or once a month, rather than once a year to write a new I.E.P.

***to enable parents to be involved in the educational planning for their child.***

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“part of the planning looks at adult needs too...”

-Karen Patterson, education consultant  
Tri-County Special Education Cooperative

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Parents are an integral part of each student's collaborative planning team. Parents can, and should be, considered equal team members. They bring tremendous expertise regarding their own children to the team. Parents contribute many ideas regarding preferred learning activities, peer interaction, generalization of skills to other settings, home-school programs, and so on. Participation in a collaborative team brings parents, teachers and principals together in a cooperative effort to plan in a proactive way for student success.

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“...It has made me alot more comfortable...  
you get so many more ideas with everyone working together...”  
-Vicki Autem, parent  
Parsons

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***to develop transition plans for a student's movement to the next school placement.***

Collaborative teams meet throughout the school year to plan and monitor students' programs. As the end of the school year approaches, the student team begins to plan for the next school year. New team members may be added to the team, particularly the next grade teacher. If the student will be changing school buildings, the principal and other staff members may also join the team. This planning should begin early in the second semester to allow time for teacher planning, acquisition of needed materials and/or equipment, student transition activities, teaching of survival skills needed in the next setting, peer and staff orientation, building modifications, etc.

With this advanced planning; teachers, parents, staff, and students can leave school in the summer feeling confident about their plans for the beginning of school in the fall.

**A COLLABORATIVE TEAM** is  
a set of  
**interpersonal relationships**  
structured to achieve  
**established goals.**

## **Team members have two major tasks:**

- 1) to assist in maintaining positive working relationships in the team.**
- 2) to assist in achieving the task or goal**

In most teams, the primary focus has been on number 2, achieving the task or "getting the job done". Team members tend to spend very little time or energy on number one, maintaining and enhancing relationships between group members. In collaborative teams, the quality of task outcomes and relationships are BOTH seen as critical indicators of effectiveness. It is not enough to simply do the job. Effective teams also pay attention to how people work together and how people feel about working together.

Team members feel good about WHAT they accomplish and HOW they feel while working together in **effective** collaborative teams. These two components lead team members to seek out opportunities for collaboration.

These two tasks, achieving the goal AND maintaining positive relationships, can only be accomplished in teams that demonstrate the following five basic elements of collaborative teams.

## **FIVE BASIC ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATIVE TEAMS**

### **1) Frequent face-to-face interaction**

Johnson and Johnson (1987) and Thousand and Villa (1992) suggest no more than six or seven members as an optimal size for collaborative groups. This size is large enough to allow for diversity among members, yet ensures that each person will have opportunities to contribute and participate.

Teams must meet frequently to develop collaborative relationships among team members. If teams meet only when there are problems, positive growth and proactive planning cannot occur. Frequent meetings enhance the development of communication, trust and commitment to the group's goals.

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"..people that are dealing with him on a daily basis, talking about progress or... lack of progress ...changes get made quickly, they don't have to wait a week to occur..."

- Jolene Saunders, special education teacher  
Topeka Public Schools

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## **2) A positive "sink-or-swim together" sense of interdependence**

Thousand and Villa (1992) outline three strategies to foster this "all for one, one for all" attitude among members:

- a) having team members discuss individual and mutual team goals,
- b) distributing leadership functions among members, and
- c) creating common rewards and responsibilities.

## **3) Small group social skills in leadership, communication, trust building, decision making, and conflict management**

The most effective teams are those which employ a consensual (ie. all members must agree) rather than a democratic (ie. the greatest number of votes wins) decision making process. To behave in a consensual fashion, however, requires the development of a great many small group social skills including trust, active listening, perspective taking, questioning for deeper understanding, and skills in giving and receiving criticism. (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). The mastery of these social skills does not occur overnight.

A major issue for all beginning teams is how to acquire these basic collaborative skills. Three potential methods to help team members learn and apply these skills are through on-going inservice, through teaching social skills and cooperative learning to students and through group processing (see item 4 - Periodic Team Processing).

## **4) Periodic team processing**

Time should be designated during team meetings to assess and discuss how well members are achieving the two tasks of collaborative teams: 1) achieving the task or goal and 2) maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Periodic processing of how well the group is functioning and how the group might do better in the future is essential to group development.

Processing heightens awareness of interpersonal skills and task achievement behavior. During team processing members give one another positive feedback and constructive criticism. The team also discusses the current division of labor and reassigns role and responsibilities as needed. This allows teams to set goals for improving relationships and more effectively accomplishing tasks.

## 5) Individual accountability

Clear accountability for personal responsibilities within the team exists when members are aware that their contributions to the group effort are identifiable and necessary for group success. This can be achieved by keeping a public record of individual assignments through written minutes of team meetings. Team members individual accountability also increases when they realize that they must fulfill their responsibilities in order for the group to be successful.

## Shared Leadership Through Team Roles

Team roles help ensure the sharing of leadership responsibilities. They also provide a structured method for team members to assess and set goals. This, in turn, improves the group's success in functioning as a cohesive team.

Team roles should be rotated at each team meeting. In this way, the team has as many leaders as it has members and the message is communicated that no one person has the expertise, authority, or resources needed to accomplish the team's goals (Thousand & Villa, 1992).

Exactly, which roles are employed during team meetings depends on the nature of the task and the interpersonal skills of the individual members. New roles may be created by teams to fulfill unique group needs.

Some of the more common roles used by collaborative teams include:

**Facilitator:** encourages the participation of each team member.

**Recorder:** records pertinent information and decisions made by the team.

**Timekeeper:** watches the clock and makes sure time is used efficiently based on the agenda.

**Observer:** attends to the use of collaborative skills by team members and engages the group in processing their effectiveness in achieving task

## **STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT**

### ***The Four F's of Teaming***

The interpersonal skills of team members affect the success of collaborative efforts (Johnson, 1986,1987; Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

D. Johnson, R. Johnson, Holubec, and Roy (1984) have identified four levels of social skills which team members use at various stages of group development:

#### ***FORMING***

building trust

The basic skills needed to initiate a collaborative group.

{attending the meeting, arriving on time, staying for the entire meeting, knowing one another's names, encouraging everyone to participate, looking actively involved}

#### ***FUNCTIONING***

communication and leadership

The skills to manage task completion activities and maintain effective working relationships among members.

{stating meeting purpose, using time limits, asking for help or clarification, expressing verbal and nonverbal support, describing feelings when appropriate, offering to clarify or paraphrase contributions}

#### ***FORMULATING***

problem solving and decision making

The skills to make decisions, solve problems and generate ideas in collaborative, consensus-building ways.

{summarizing, asking other members why and how they are reasoning, asking for feedback in a non-confrontational way, checking for understanding, deciding on next steps}

## ***FERMENTING***

controversey and conflict resolution

The skills to recognize controversey and conflict as opportunities to explore divergent perspectives and use them to create novel solutions.

{criticizing ideas without criticizing people, asking for justification of ideas, planning and assessing feasibility of solution implementation, integrating different ideas/opinions into a single position, building on other members ideas, asking questions that lead to deeper analysis, using outside data to evaluate ideas}

The above lists of social skills are not intended to be exhaustive; they are meant to provide examples of skills important to effective team functioning. The use of interpersonal skills may be assessed, taught, practiced and evaluated. Intentional practice and feedback is required for improvement of individual and group skills in collaboration. Effective teams designate time during team meetings to assess and discuss performance on task completion and relationship maintenance.

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“...it’s okay to disagree and voice your opinion...that’s been a growing process for me...”

-Toni Habiger, 4th grade teacher  
Parsons District Schools

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Effective team members possess the following characteristics:

*treat others as individuals*

*accept and appreciate differences in others*

*are flexible, especially when faced with stress*

*are active, participating and productive*

*are willing learners*

*communicate in constructive ways*

*are willing to share work, responsibilities, accolades and failure*

*bring problem solving skills and collaborative values to the group*

An important thing to remember is that these behaviors can be learned and developed among team members. Inservice training, peer coaching, team processing and observations, and setting team goals for improvement of interpersonal behaviors are just a few ways to improve the effectiveness of individual members.

### ***Collaborative Teaming is...***

...changing schools, increasing the diversity of students, and playing a vital role in the school improvement movement.

...an important tool to meet changing needs, and support teaching staff.

...a successful strategy to support learners with extreme educational challenges in general education settings.

...the future!!

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“...we are finding out finally that when we can learn how to work together; we all have different ideas and are coming from different perspectives.....better plan for individual students or for a school building or for ALL students...I would hate to see us ever go back to the old model where one person is making the decision... because too many people out there have too much expertise to contribute...”

-Steve Frazell, elementary principal  
Parsons District Schools

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“...a more realistic model of life...”

- Dale Cushinberry, elementary principal  
Topeka Public Schools

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## **CONCLUSION**

Collaborative teaming is a more realistic way of joining together the key players in the lives of students - parents, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, therapists, and others - in a process that encourages cooperation, interdependence, and support.

As adults who serve as models for children, the time has come for us to develop these skills. After all, many of the most critical issues (and not so critical issues) we face throughout our lives can be most successfully addressed when we can communicate and solve problems with other people.

This videoguide is intended to serve as an introduction to collaborative teaming. If you and your team members are interested in more information about the mechanics of initiating and developing the collaborative team process, there is a second publication called “A Resource Manual for Developing Collaborative Teams for Inclusion-Oriented Schools”. This manual provides more detailed information, activities and sample forms to address some common questions about collaborative teams:

Who should be a member of the student planning team?

How is the team meeting agenda developed?

How often and how long should teams meet?

What can be done about “problem behaviors” among team members?

How can we implement the five basic elements of collaborative teams?

How can we find time to meet?

What about the role of peers on planning teams?

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“As a parent, I see such a benefit for the regular ed system and special ed system working together.. they both have so much to offer each other...”

-Teri Goodrich, parent  
Topeka

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